

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
WACO DIVISION**

HELEN R. REYES,

Plaintiff,

v.

GOLD STAR FINANCE, INC.,

Defendant.

CIVIL COMPLAINT

CASE NO. 6:19-cv-00030

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

COMPLAINT

NOW comes HELEN R. REYES (“Plaintiff”), by and through her attorneys, Sulaiman Law Group, Ltd. (“Sulaiman”), complaining as to the conduct of GOLD STAR FINANCE, INC. (“Defendant”), as follows:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

1. Plaintiff brings this action for damages pursuant to the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (“TCPA”) under 47 U.S.C. §227 *et seq.*, and the Texas Debt Collection Act (“TDCA”) under Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392 *et seq.*, for Defendant’s unlawful conduct.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. This action arises under and is brought pursuant to the TCPA. Subject matter jurisdiction is conferred upon this Court by 47 U.S.C §227, 28 U.S.C. §§1331 and 1337, as the action arises under the laws of the United States. Supplemental jurisdiction exists for Plaintiff’s state law claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367 because it arises out of the same common nucleus of operative facts as Plaintiff’s federal question claim.

3. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391 as Defendant conducts business in the Western District of Texas and a substantial portion the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred within the Western District of Texas.

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff is a natural person over 18 years-of-age residing in Milam County, Texas, which is located within the Western District of Texas.

5. Plaintiff is a “person” as defined by 47 U.S.C. §153(39).

6. Defendant is a corporation formed under the laws of the state of Texas, and has its principal place of business located at 612 W. Main Street, Denison, Texas 75020-3210. Defendant provides lending services to consumers in the state of Texas.

7. Defendant is a “person” as defined by 47 U.S.C. §153(39).

8. Defendant acted through its agents, employees, officers, members, directors, heirs, successors, assigns, principals, trustees, sureties, subrogees, representatives and insurers at all times relevant to the instant action.

FACTS SUPPORTING CAUSES OF ACTION

9. Several months ago, Plaintiff obtained a personal consumer loan from Defendant.

10. Due to financial hardship, Plaintiff fell behind on her scheduled payments to Defendant, thus incurring debt (“subject debt”).

11. Around December of 2018, Plaintiff began receiving calls to her cellular phone, (512) XXX-8963, from Defendant seeking to collect upon the subject debt.

12. At all times relevant to the instant action, Plaintiff was the sole subscriber, owner, and operator of the cellular phone ending in -8963. Plaintiff is and has always been financially responsible for the cellular phone and its services.

13. Defendant mainly uses the phone number (512) 352-5476 when placing phone calls to Plaintiff's cellular phone. Upon information and belief, Defendant uses other phone numbers to contact Plaintiff's cellular phone.

14. Upon information and belief, the above-referenced phone number ending in -5476 is regularly utilized by Defendant during its debt collection activity.

15. Recently, Plaintiff retained counsel to file for bankruptcy. Around December of 2018, and upon the advice of Plaintiff's counsel, Plaintiff mailed a cease and desist letter to Defendant.

16. Thereafter, in order to reinforce her demands, Plaintiff mailed a second cease and desist letter to Defendant to reiterate her demands to stop contacting her.

17. Despite Plaintiff's efforts, Defendant continued to regularly call her cellular phone up until the filing of this lawsuit.

18. Defendant has also placed multiple calls to Plaintiff's cellular phone during the same day, even after being notified to stop.

19. Plaintiff has received not less than 15 phone calls from Defendant since asking it to stop calling.

20. Frustrated over Defendant's conduct, Plaintiff spoke with Sulaiman regarding her rights, resulting in expenses.

21. Plaintiff has been unfairly and unnecessarily harassed by Defendant's actions.

22. Plaintiff has suffered concrete harm as a result of Defendant's actions, including but not limited to, invasion of privacy, aggravation that accompanies collection telephone calls, emotional distress, increased risk of personal injury resulting from the distraction caused by the never-ending calls, increased usage of her telephone services, loss of cellular phone capacity,

diminished cellular phone functionality, decreased battery life on her cellular phone, and diminished space for data storage on her cellular phone.

COUNT I – VIOLATIONS OF THE TELEPHONE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

23. Plaintiff repeats and realleges paragraphs 1 through 22 as though fully set forth herein.

24. The TCPA, pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(iii), prohibits calling persons on their cellular phone using an automatic telephone dialing system (“ATDS”) or prerecorded messages without their consent. The TCPA, under 47 U.S.C. § 227(a)(1), defines an ATDS as “equipment which has the capacity...to store or produce telephone numbers to be called, using a random or sequential number generator; and to dial such numbers.”

25. Defendant used an ATDS in connection with its communications directed towards Plaintiff’s cellular phone. Defendant’s persistent contacts even after Plaintiff demanded that the phone calls stop demonstrates Defendant’s use of an ATDS. Moreover, the nature and frequency of Defendant’s contacts during the same day(s) is indicative of Defendant’s use of an ATDS.

26. Defendant violated the TCPA by placing at least 15 phone calls to Plaintiff’s cellular phone using an ATDS without her consent. Any consent that Plaintiff *may* have given to Defendant was specifically revoked by Plaintiff’s demands that it cease contacting her.

27. The calls placed by Defendant to Plaintiff were regarding collection activity and not for emergency purposes as defined by the TCPA under 47 U.S.C. §227(b)(1)(A)(i).

28. Under the TCPA, pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(3)(B), Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for at least \$500.00 per call. Moreover, Defendant’s willful and knowing violations of the TCPA should trigger this Honorable Court’s ability to triple the damages to which Plaintiff is otherwise entitled to under 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(3)(C).

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, HELEN R. REYES, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court enter judgment in her favor as follows:

- a. Declaring that the practices complained of herein are unlawful and violate the aforementioned statutes and regulations;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff damages of at least \$500.00 per phone call and treble damages pursuant to 47 U.S.C. §§ 227(b)(3)(B)&(C);
- c. Awarding Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees; and
- d. Awarding any other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

COUNT II – VIOLATIONS OF THE TEXAS DEBT COLLECTION ACT

29. Plaintiff restates and realleges paragraphs 1 through 28 as though fully set forth herein.

30. Plaintiff is a “consumer” as defined by Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.001(1).

31. Defendant is a “debt collector” as defined by Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.001(6).

32. The subject debt is a “consumer debt” as defined by Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.001(2) as it is an obligation, or alleged obligation, arising from a transaction for personal, family, or household purposes.

a. Violations of TDCA § 392.302

33. The TDCA, pursuant to Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.302(4), states that “a debt collector may not oppress, harass, or abuse a person by causing a telephone to ring repeatedly or continuously, or making repeated or continuous telephone calls, with the intent to harass a person at the called number.”

34. Defendant violated the TDCA when it continued to call Plaintiff’s cellular phone at least 15 times after she notified it to stop calling. The repeated contacts were made with the hope that Plaintiff would succumb to the harassing behavior and ultimately submit a payment. Rather than

understanding Plaintiff's situation and abiding by her wishes, Defendant continued in its harassing campaign of phone calls in hopes of extracting payment.

35. Upon being told to stop calling, Defendant had ample reason to be aware that it should not continue its harassing calling campaign. Yet, Defendant consciously chose to continue placing systematic calls to Plaintiff's cellular phone knowing that its conduct was unwelcome. Upon information and belief, Defendant consciously chose to continue to harass Plaintiff because it was aware of Plaintiff's intent to file for bankruptcy. Consequently, it was Defendant's goal to extract payment from Plaintiff through its coercive tactics before Plaintiff filed her bankruptcy petition.

b. Violations of TDCA § 392.304

36. The TDCA, pursuant to Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.304(19) prohibits a debt collector from "using any . . . false representation or deceptive means to collect a debt or obtain information concerning a consumer."

37. Defendant violated the TDCA through the implicit misrepresentations made on phone calls placed to Plaintiff's cellular phone. Through its conduct, Defendant misleadingly represented to Plaintiff that it had the lawful ability to continue contacting her cellular phone using an automated system absent her consent. Such lawful ability was revoked upon Plaintiff demanding that Defendant stop calling her cellular phone, illustrating the deceptive nature of Defendant's conduct.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, HELEN R. REYES, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court enter judgment in her favor as follows:

- a. Declaring that the practices complained of herein are unlawful and violate the aforementioned statutes and regulations;
- b. Entitling Plaintiff to injunctive relief pursuant to Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.403(a)(1).
- c. Awarding Plaintiff actual damages, pursuant to Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.403(a)(2).

- d. Awarding Plaintiff punitive damages, in an amount to be determined at trial, for the underlying violations;
- e. Awarding Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees, pursuant to Tex. Fin. Code Ann. § 392.403(b);
- f. Awarding any other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

Dated: January 30, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

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